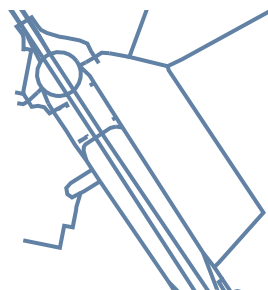




National Security Strategy





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Foreword

Our world and our society face fundamental challenges. This world is not only more connected but also more contested. Achievements of the European post-war construct are being challenged, and the international order is under pressure. For the first time since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the very principles of our liberal democracies are being openly attacked by authoritarian regimes.

Belgium and Europe are confronted with new and more complex threats. Not only state but also non-state actors are increasingly turning to hybrid methods that test the boundaries between war and peace, ranging from influencing public opinion through disinformation to large-scale cyberattacks.

Conflicts at Europe's borders create a breeding ground for terrorism and migration.

COVID-19 has tested our country's resilience as never before. The global effects of this crisis, whether medical, economic or political, will be felt for a long time to come.

Moreover, climate change is hitting harder and faster than many expected, and doing so at great human, social and economic cost.

In a period of flux, the public authorities' primary responsibility remains the security of our country and its citizens, as well as the values underpinning our society.

In this light, the government has drawn up a National Security Strategy for the first time, reflecting its view of the threats and risks affecting Belgium's vital interests. This National Security Strategy proposes an integrated policy to tackle them head on, and rather than passively 'undergo' the threats, to anticipate them and create opportunities. If we manage to come up with innovative responses to climate change, for example, we can share them with other countries. Similarly, a secure IT infrastructure will give our companies a competitive edge.

Belgium is one of the world's most open societies and economies. That is our strength, but it also makes us more vulnerable. Furthermore, our vision of security is not only aimed at defending interests but also associated with values centred on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

This means that our internal security and external security are closely intertwined. That is why our security policy requires both decisive measures in Belgium to make our country more resilient and action abroad to contribute to a secure environment



and a rules-based international order. Belgium can only do this in partnership with others, in particular in an EU context. As such, this strategy fits within the framework of multilateral security strategies such as the EU Global Strategy and NATO's Strategic Concept. Belgium indeed, as the nerve centre of both the European Union and NATO, bears a special responsibility in this regard.

This National Security Strategy aims to make a key contribution to the development of a security culture in which an increased awareness of threats and risks is linked to the protection of our interests. This is an indivisible core task shared by all of our country's governments. The business community, academia, private partners and all of us as citizens also have a role to play here.

This National Security Strategy provides an overarching framework for more detailed sub-strategies, whether already in existence or yet to be developed. It is not a document that once drafted is set in stone, but a process that will be closely monitored and regularly updated.

Alexander De Croo
Prime Minister

1 December 2021

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. De Croo', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Belgium's place in the world

Our vision of security is determined by who we are and by the values we consider important.

Belgium is a country where fundamental rights are safeguarded and protected. It has an open and multilingual society that is extraordinarily creative and culturally diverse. It is a country of emigration and immigration, which, as well as a substantial diaspora, boasts large communities with both European and non-European roots on its territory. It is also a country with a unique socio-economic model geared towards a fair distribution of wealth.

Belgium is characterised, too, by a complex, historically-conditioned institutional and political structure that must be taken into account in its security policy.

Due to its geographical location, Belgium has experienced how vulnerable it can be at times of international tension and how important it is to make its mark abroad by playing a leading role in many areas. However, this role is never assured forever and requires a sustained commitment.

After two world wars, Belgium steadfastly opted for multilateral integration – in particular within the European Union (EU) – and the international legal order. The destiny of Belgium, as a founding member of the EU, is uniquely linked to that of the EU for its prosperity, its security and the defence of its values around the world. Belgium also fosters strategic alliances with the United Nations (UN) and its agencies, ranking indeed among the top 20 donors to these bodies, and with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). For Belgium, which aims specifically to act as a bridge-builder, this entails duties and responsibilities as well as rights and channels of influence.

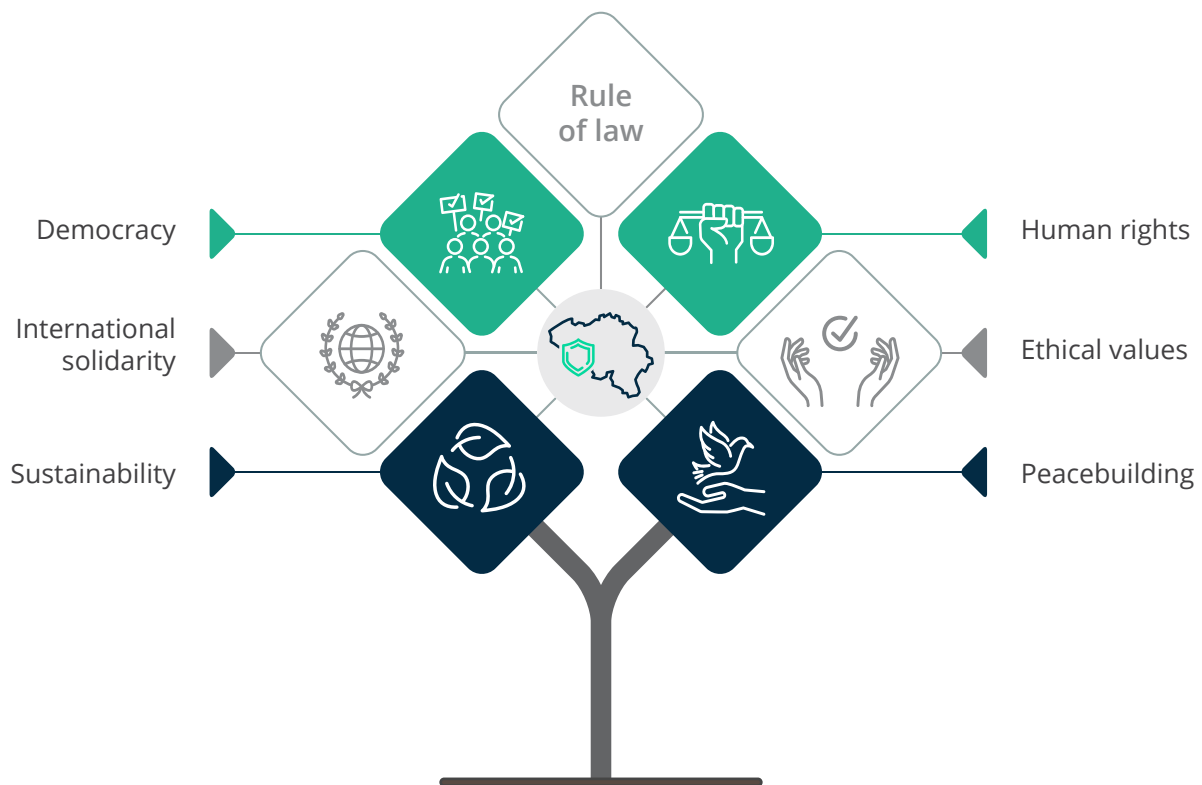
The fact that Belgium is home to the EU's key institutions and to NATO Headquarters brings with it a particular responsibility to be a reliable partner. Moreover, no capital city around the world has a larger international diplomatic community than Brussels, with over 300 foreign diplomatic missions and 120 international organisations. Beyond Europe, Belgium has special ties with third countries, including

not only its transatlantic partners, the United States and Canada, but also states in Central Africa with which it has a shared history.

Given that Belgium is a strong and open economy, trade accounts for 85%, no less, of our GDP and one fifth of our jobs. Belgium is in fact one of the world's top 10 export countries. Our economy operates within a framework – established by the EU – of free movement of people, goods, capital and services and relies on international trade and investment. Innovation and a highly skilled and specialised workforce are a driving force here.

Belgium is one of Europe's key logistics and service hubs for energy, finance, transport and communication. Our infrastructure, especially our seaports, play a major role here.

However, our vision of security is not only aimed at defending interests; it is also associated with values. Belgium follows and promotes an agenda centred on democracy, human rights and the rule of law, ethical values, international solidarity, sustainability and peacebuilding.



— Fig. 1 | Values underpinning the National Security Strategy —

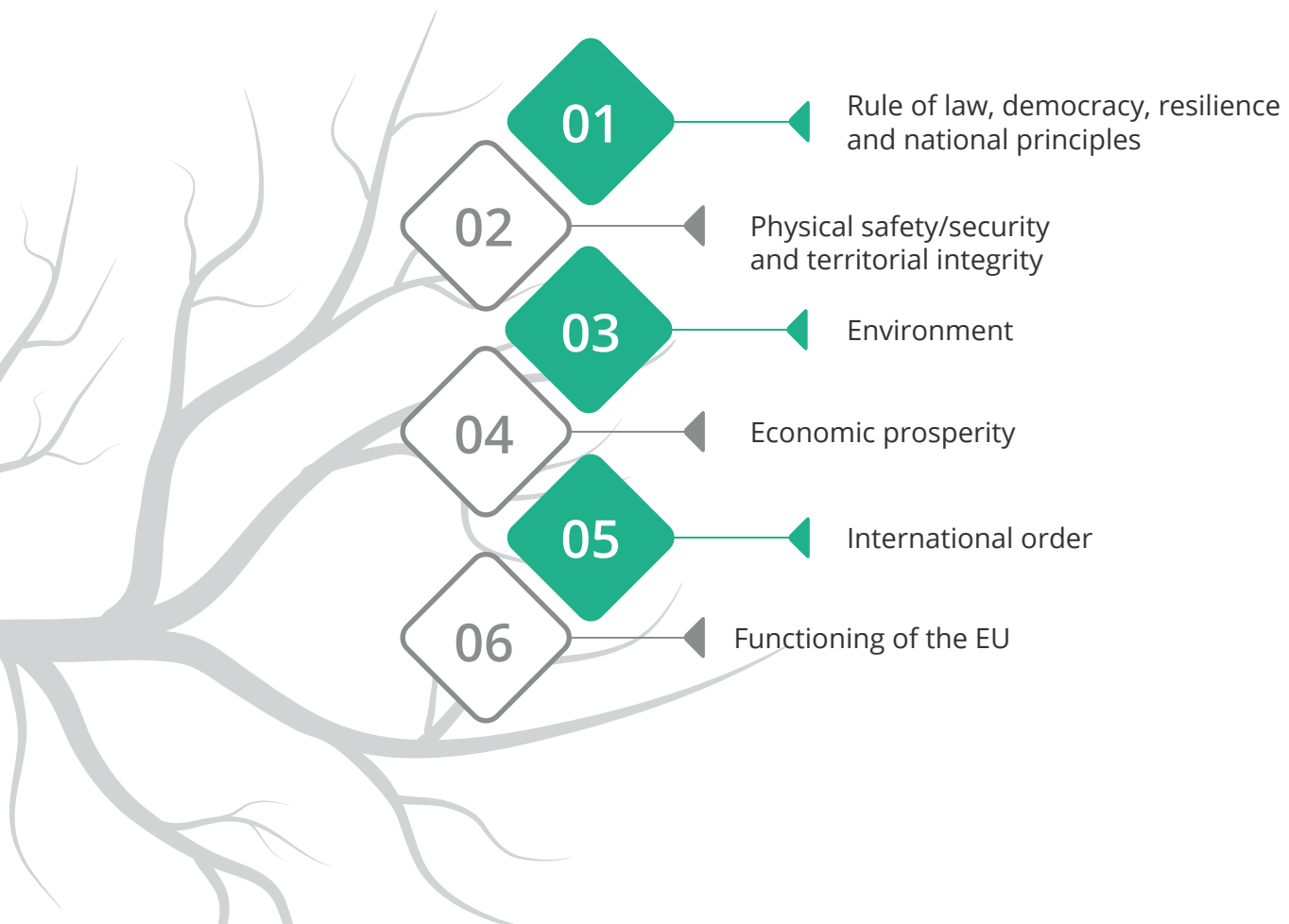
For all the above reasons, ours is a comprehensive vision of security. This demands an integrated policy approach with input from every section of our society and every sector of our economy, each drawing on their specific expertise. This is not only a core task for government but also a shared social responsibility.



Vital interests

A National Security Strategy (NSS) revolves around the vital interests that determine the internal cohesion of our country and the survival of our society. It is therefore important that these interests be properly identified in a comprehensive view of national risk management. When these interests are at stake, there is either (the possibility of) social disruption, including damage to the democratic legal order, or a significant weakening of the state if no action is taken. However, we must be careful with our use of the term 'vital' interest, namely one that we as a society are prepared to make sacrifices to safeguard.

Belgium's national security is in play if one or more of the following vital interests are threatened:



01 The achievements of a democratic state under the rule of law, national resilience and the associated shared values

Preserving social and political stability and the freedoms underpinning our society is a core task of any government. Central to this is the 'social contract', whereby the government ensures the provision of public services and offers the benefits of the welfare state to citizens, who actively participate in society and political decision-making. The integrity and continuity of political, judicial and administrative activities are essential in this regard. Furthermore, the resilience of vital social services and also of the very fabric of society is crucial.

02 The physical safety/security of our citizens and the territorial integrity of our country

Protecting the population and the country is the primary task of any government. This includes a responsibility to protect Belgian citizens abroad. This interest is closely intertwined with that of our neighbours and allies, especially within the EU and NATO. National security is also being increasingly impacted by the digital space. Therefore, the integrity of the digital space is part of physical and territorial security and at the same time is intertwined with every other security interest.

03 The natural environment in our country

Our environment provides the basic elements for our existence. This makes its preservation essential. Climate change and biodiversity loss are global challenges with a direct impact on our country. Examples of this are preserving air quality, open space, water supplies and food production. This entails the sustainable use of scarce resources, partly in light of the energy transition.

04 Economic prosperity

The efficient functioning of our open economy is based on a strong trade and investment framework regulated at national and international levels, in which social and environmental standards are also crucial. Protecting vital economic infrastructure and assets, including foreign investments, is a key starting point. For a country with limited raw materials, security of supply is essential. With the shift towards an innovative economy, scientific and technological interests are growing in importance. We strive for a social and inclusive market economy in which the economy can grow sustainably with a view to enhancing our population's quality of life.

05 The international order based on international law and multilateral frameworks

Belgium is highly connected internationally – physically, digitally, economically and politically. As a result of these connections and the increasing interdependence of internal and external security, our country relies heavily on the proper functioning and adequate reach of the international system of reliable and enforceable standards and arrangements and on efficient multilateral organisations. This interest does not stand alone but is closely intertwined with our other security interests.

6 The effective functioning of the EU, involving the sharing of key elements of our sovereignty

European integration offers on the one hand the framework for key policy areas and on the other hand the best instrument for defending Belgian interests on a global scale. Community law and mutual cooperation are crucial pillars of this approach. The internal market and the free movement of people, goods, services and capital are vital for our economy. This is closely linked to a credible euro, a stable finance system and adequate financial capacity for the EU. As such, the consolidation and deepening of European integration are vital.

Trends and drivers of change

Various transnational trends and drivers interact, multiplying their impact on Belgium's vital interests.

// The climate crisis

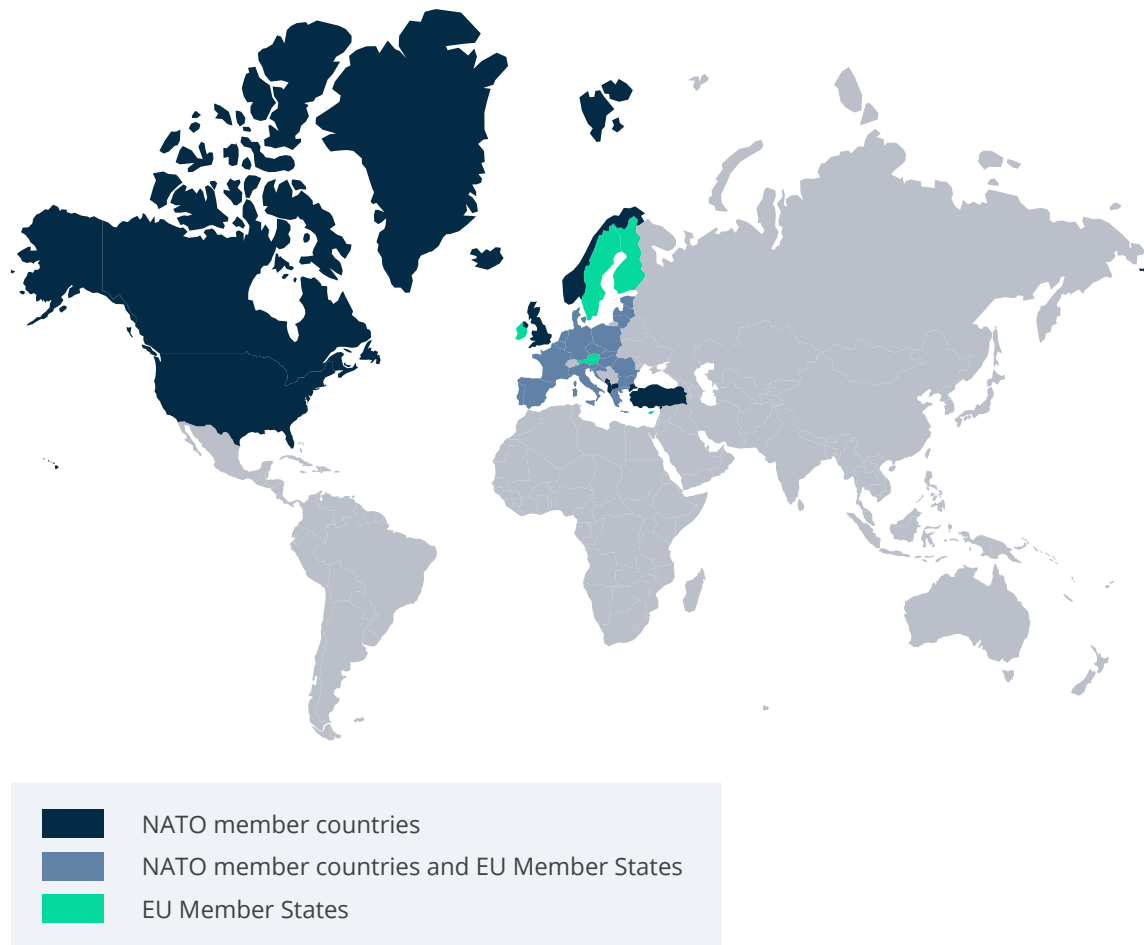
The challenge overshadowing everything is the environmental disruption caused by climate change, the loss of biodiversity and biomass, and the pressure on the environment from human activity. This poses a threat to our social model and also has a multiplier effect on other phenomena such as poverty, conflict and migration, increasing pressure on states (not least the EU's southern neighbours) and the multilateral system. The climate crisis, along with the transition to green energy, also creates opportunities. The declining importance of fossil fuels has the potential to undermine one of the main drivers of conflict. However, there is also a risk of instability if the countries involved do not make timely preparations for this transition, given that access to non-fossil fuels and raw materials could become a major threat to economic development in Belgium and across Europe.

// Superpower politics and a world order under pressure

As has generally been the case throughout history, the relations between the world's superpowers, the United States, China and Russia, and of course the EU, are the main political driver of global politics. The shift in centres of power – from the Atlantic region to Asia, as well as between countries and non-state actors – transcends such superpowers, but it is at superpower level where the pursuit of interests leads to global competition for markets, raw materials, partners and influence. Securing maritime traffic routes and managing maritime space are crucial in this respect. However, interests may also coincide, meaning that countries naturally work together to address shared challenges.

However, the competition between the superpowers is increasing, especially between China, which in no time has become a global player and wants to expand its influence, and the United States, which wants to maintain its leadership position. Meanwhile, Russia is seeking to boost its superpower status through assertive action, especially at the borders of Europe. This trend will undoubtedly continue. Even now,

close political, economic and military competition often descends into rivalry, with superpowers deliberately undermining and antagonising each other and trying to forge exclusive spheres of influence. This disrupts trade and investment flows and cultural and scientific relationships and leads to the erosion of multilateral organisations and the international legal order, at the expense of our prosperity and security and the ability to tackle global problems. The transatlantic alliance continues to be a mainstay of global politics, but one consequence of the rivalry between China and the United States is that there has been a shift in the strategic focus from Europe to Asia.



— Fig. 2 | World map —

If such rivalry becomes systematic and permanent, there is the risk that our globalised world will disintegrate once again into opposing power blocs, each promoting their own 'system' and world view and forcing other countries to choose a side.

Historically, Belgium has often been the 'plaything' of great powers. Today, our country is part of the EU and NATO, but even those organisations are not immune to the consequences of this kind of rivalry. The European Union's position is under pressure as a result of the shifting balance of power, while it faces growing Euroscepticism within the EU. The challenge for the EU is to forge sufficient cohesion, strategic autonomy and resilience to ensure its self-preservation and to play a leadership role for the sake of a stable world order.

// Globalisation, international mobility, economic concentration and geo-economic competition

International economic interconnectedness has meant that the production of specific goods, parts and services, which are often crucial to our society and economy, is increasingly concentrated in just a few countries and companies. This has led to vulnerable dependencies. This trend is reinforced by the lack of a level playing field when it comes to international competition, as not all countries require companies to take account of the environmental factors associated with their economic production in the cost structure and to respect environmental, social and human rights standards.

At the same time, continuing and systematic liberalisation is meeting protectionist resistance, not least from the superpowers who are increasingly weaponising trade flows, foreign investment, intellectual property rules and certain subsidies and preferential agreements in their rivalry. The existing multilateral framework is not strong enough to manage this geo-economic trend.

Globalisation and liberalisation have also presented our citizens with huge opportunities. As well as the large number of Belgians travelling internationally, there are more than 500,000 permanent residents abroad – a trend which is on the rise.

// Technological developments

Technology has always been a driver of change. Whenever humanity learns to master a new dimension (the seas, airspace, outer space and now cyberspace), it creates not only new possibilities but also new dependencies, vulnerabilities and forms of conflict. Developments in emerging disruptive technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence and quantum computing (which are now mainly being developed in the commercial sector) are resulting in more interdependence and greater diffusion of digital technologies, which are also used as weapons. Military technology is more evenly distributed, especially between the superpowers, reducing the relative military preponderance of NATO countries. New ethical questions are arising about which technologies may be used for what.

In the technological sphere, economic concentration is in full swing: a small number of multinational companies are gaining increasing access to more and more digital data. This development is putting pressure on the protection of personal data and privacy. As a result, it is also generating more opportunities to direct the public debate, including potentially against the values and interests of the countries where they operate. Only a few countries, most notably China and Russia, elude their grasp, whether entirely or in part. At the same time, here too, competition between the superpowers comes into play, with each promoting its own technological standards. Many also use the new technologies to undermine the sovereignty of other countries.

// The growing reach of non-state actors

There is a trend towards economic actors pursuing a monopoly in vital goods and services. In particular, the tech giants have acquired a dominant position, partly because national governments have allowed them to do so. Cautious steps have been taken with a view to restoring more state control.

Other non-state actors deliberately place themselves outside the ambit of the state. Organised crime has huge financial resources at its disposal and operates in international networks. Through corruption and intimidation, it has managed to gain a grip on government and society in many countries. Terrorist organisations also recruit and organise themselves internationally and often have links with organised



crime. They respond to emerging extremism and polarisation in society. Terrorism comes and goes in waves, and is set to remain an important driver, certainly in the Middle East and Africa.

// Inequality and demographics

Globalisation has generally increased prosperity, but it has also left many people behind. Many feel that they now count for nothing in a globalised world. Since the 2008 financial crisis, economic inequality has started to increase again worldwide, and this has only been exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis. There are still very high levels of gender inequality, and some of the progress made in terms of women's rights has been reversed. The rights of the LGBTQIA+ community are also under increased pressure, and here Europe is no exception. Inequality is a direct affront to the Belgian social model, sparks tensions in society and undermines the legitimacy of the state and the world order, in Belgium and around the globe. Inequality has a multiplier effect on conflict and migration, producing a more fertile breeding ground for polarisation and extremist ideologies which lead in some cases to violence, whether nationalistic, identitarian or religious in nature.

Globally, inequality is exacerbated by the prevailing demographic trend, particularly in Africa, where a quarter of the world's population will be living by 2050, when half of Africans will be under 25. Without corrective measures to achieve a fair distribution of wealth, inequality will continue to grow. On the other hand, demographic change also poses a challenge to the EU. Many years of low birth rates and higher life expectancy are leading to an ageing population, with repercussions for the labour market, healthcare and pension systems. In the face of weak or negative demographic growth across Europe, targeted migration growth is becoming more and more important for the future of the social security system and the recruitment of labour for specific sectors.

// Challenges to democratic governance

Against the backdrop of a loss of confidence in politics and government, in various democratic states citizens, parties and even governments, including within the EU and NATO, are turning away from the achievements of democracy and the rule of law. In 2021, the combined GDP of democracies accounted for less than half of global GDP. Many already authoritarian countries are becoming even more repressive. This trend is often associated with inequality and uncertainty. In history there is no linear progression from authoritarianism to democracy: between the two world wars, democracy collapsed even in the majority of European countries.

Alongside authoritarianism, nationalism is also on the rise. Patriotism creates cohesion in a country and strengthens the support base of the state. In contrast, nationalism, which takes the form of opposition to others, intensifies competition and rivalry between states. Again, the same applies within the EU and NATO. Without effective countermeasures, there is a risk that both trends will undermine their cohesion and effectiveness. Authoritarianism, too, fosters extreme ideologies and religious views, potentially resulting in violence.



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Politie

Zaventem



Threats and risks

// Conventional and hybrid state threats

Increasing tensions between the superpowers are posing a threat to our part of the world. The Russian action in Ukraine is just one illustration of the growing military momentum in the pursuit of national interests, meaning that borders in Europe are once again under threat from armed intervention. However, territorial tensions are also on the rise further afield, for instance in South-East and East Asia, where China is presenting itself as the economic and military superpower of the future. Annual increases in global military expenditure illustrate such tension.

A united NATO with a sufficient deterrent capacity is meant to avert any direct military threat to our territory. A strengthened and integrated European defence capability should play an increasing role in this.

Even though a direct threat to our national borders is unlikely, the risk of international armed crisis situations which Belgium could get mixed up in is growing, partly due to our treaty obligations, for example under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

Additionally, the race has begun for control of frontiers that have not been exploited up to now but risk becoming new areas of conflict: the Arctic region, the deep sea and outer space. Belgium should also defend its interests in these locations requiring high-tech expertise.

Conflicts and instability at our borders create a power vacuum that gives free rein to extremists, terrorist groups and organised crime, puts pressure on the wider region and threatens Europe's security and its trade routes. Russia and increasingly China, as well as Turkey and the Gulf states, are using this vacuum to boost their place in the world. If this contributes to high levels of uncontrolled and irregular migration, it can have an impact on the public sphere and put pressure on social stability. There is no shying away by third countries that influence migration from using this as leverage.

All this heralds a new era in which state and also non-state actors are increasingly turning to hybrid methods and techniques. These include the combined use of conventional and non-conventional techniques that test the boundaries between war and peace, ranging from influencing public opinion through disinformation to cyberattacks and espionage and to blackmail, sabotage and chemical, biological,

radiological, nuclear and explosive (CBRNe) attacks. Hybrid attacks target adversaries' vulnerabilities, are ambiguous in nature and deliberately attempt to stay below the thresholds of detection, making attribution difficult.

Espionage occurs in every era, and this threat will not drop off in the decades ahead. Both espionage and interference are primarily intended to serve the strategic interests of third countries and to strengthen their own dominant position (e.g. by obtaining information that provides an ad hoc, tactical or strategic advantage – be it of a political, military or scientific/economic nature).

Hybrid actions also aim to weaken our democratic legal order and to undermine cohesion and solidarity within our society, the EU and NATO, thereby compromising our effectiveness. Belgium, as the nerve centre of the EU and NATO, runs a greater risk in this regard.

// Economic threats

Belgium has a very open economy, and one that is closely intertwined with neighbouring countries and EU Member States. Foreign trade and investment are key motors for economic growth. They contribute not only to economic activity and employment, but also to knowledge transfer and innovation, making them absolutely vital. Still, there is growing concern about the potential risks involved. When it comes to investments from certain countries outside the EU that harm our fundamental interests, vigilance is called for. Takeovers are carried out by foreign companies or government-run companies not necessarily just for economic reasons, but also on strategic and political grounds that can lead to interference in crucial national decision-making processes or espionage. As such, they have the potential to threaten our security and public order.

Our country is also vulnerable, both in terms of the supply of raw and other materials and of technical espionage, because critical infrastructure and essential services remain overly dependent on input and technology from third countries.

Innovation is one of the main catalysts for wealth creation in our country. Key to this is support for scientific research and technological development. International cooperation in this area should be encouraged without, however, being naive about the risks associated with this in terms of espionage, technology transfers prior to 'valorisation', or the relevant knowledge being used for other purposes. At the same time, sharing wealth is vital for reducing global inequality and the risks this brings with it.

It is crucial that actors from Belgium, a country with an open economy, can compete with foreign companies freely, securely and fairly. However, this is not always the case. Foreign companies, backed by their respective governments, frequently engage in unfair competition with our companies, which risks weakening our economy. By unilaterally protecting their national markets, those governments prevent our companies from capitalising on their full growth potential.

The monetary system, financial system and public finances could be severely undermined by a crisis of confidence, entailing a dramatic loss of wealth for our country and its citizens, if they rely on assets that turn out to be overvalued.

// Organised crime

The existence of organised crime, regardless of whether it forms part of an international network, poses a threat to a secure society and a fair business environment. Violence, blackmail and intimidation, corruption and the laundering of illegal earnings are key elements in this regard. The threat of violent incidents appears to have increased as a result of the use of firearms or explosives in public.

Corruption is involved in most, if not all, organised crime. It occurs at all levels, ranging from petty bribery to multimillion-euro schemes. Corruption undermines the rule of law, weakens government institutions and hinders economic development. Legal corporate structures, often in the construction, import/export and hospitality sectors, are used to support criminal activity.

Fast-evolving technology facilitates the spread of organised crime. Criminals use encrypted communication to network with each other. The online environment offers criminals access to expertise and sophisticated tools that enable criminal activities.

Terrorist networks and criminal groups sometimes merge into hybrid organisations, which may be engaged in activities such as people smuggling, the trade in works of art and drug trafficking. With the increase in the mobility of crime, document and identity fraud has clearly become a sideline.

These phenomena show that criminal networks' adaptability in leveraging changes in the environment where they are operating is a key feature, and one that has been reaffirmed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

// **Cyberthreats and threats associated with technological developments**

The digital sphere is increasingly being used by state and non-state actors, typically to increase their influence, cause disruption and carry out espionage as well as for financial gain.

The number of recorded cybercrime offences is growing exponentially, with more and more individuals and companies falling victim to it. Attacks are a reality for the public authorities' digital infrastructure too and for that of essential services, thereby exacerbating the threat. The economic impact of cybercrime already amounts to several billion euros per year and is set to increase further. The trend of crime moving from the physical world into cyberspace has been going on for years now, but the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have taken this up a gear.

Alongside the dramatic rise in the number of financially motivated cyberattacks, the continuing growth in geopolitically or ideologically motivated cyberactions carried out by terrorists, extremists and activists (hacktivism) or state actors is a cause for great concern. Being the home of EU institutions, NATO and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) clearly makes Belgium an appealing target for cyberespionage or sabotage (in the diplomatic, academic, industrial and economic spheres). This puts the country at greater risk than its neighbours.

Cyberattacks are becoming more sophisticated, more flagrant and also more destructive in nature. Malware development is constantly evolving, which threatens to undermine resilience against cyberattacks. Emerging technologies and opportunities such as 5G, quantum computing, artificial intelligence, machine learning, cryptocurrencies, cloud technology and big data bring with them new risks of both an accidental (safety) and an intentional (security) nature.

The shift towards greater digital connectivity between devices (the Internet of Things (IoT)) is leading to a proliferation of targets and impacts, and an increased cyberrisk for every end user.

Furthermore, the origins of cyber and information attacks are still all too easy to conceal. This, together with the large number and wide variety of perpetrators, makes attribution – and an effective deterrent – difficult.

// Extremism, terrorism and breeding grounds for the radicalisation process

In a democratic state under the rule of law, conflicting views have their rightful place. People and groups are entitled to make statements of a radical nature, based on their right to free speech. However, they can also pose a threat when there is incitement to hatred and violence. Manifestations of extremism are at odds with the principles of democracy, human rights, the proper functioning of democratic institutions or other foundations of the rule of law. At the extreme end of this spectrum is terrorism, involving the use of force. Belgium has experienced first-hand how heavy the social, economic and human toll of an attack can be, especially when vital infrastructure, people in key functions, or public places are targeted.

The threat from within, especially individuals who get radicalised in Belgium and choose to commit violent acts here, is the primary threat in both Islamist and right-wing extremism.

These individuals generally act alone. These 'lone actors' usually have no formal or structural links with terrorist groups, instead being inspired by extremist or terrorist propaganda on the internet or social media. Foreign influences and narratives are being taken up by groups or individuals in Belgium. In general, the threat has become more diffuse. Perpetrators' motives have become vaguer and more diverse. Both the structural social challenges Belgium faces and international developments, including political and diplomatic tensions between countries and continents, can affect the nature of polarisation.

Following the defeats of Islamic State (IS) at its operational base in Syria and Iraq, a number of factors could lead to a resurgence of IS or similar terrorist groups. These include the volatile security situation in the Middle East, the arduous nature of reconstruction efforts, social and political discontent, and foreign interference. The impact of the return to government of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan must be closely monitored. Al-Qaeda, too, remains an active player in the global jihad. In particular, the increase in the activities of jihadist terrorist groups in Africa may have certain security implications in the long run.

Both inside and outside Europe there have been multiple right-wing extremist attacks. Worldwide, racism on social media is linked to all kinds of conspiracy theories about a 'great replacement' or impending race war. Calls to action are on the rise.

The COVID-19 pandemic and international political developments have sparked a surge in conspiracy theories and disinformation, especially on social media. Certain state actors from outside the EU play an active role in disseminating these kinds of messages. These developments have the potential to erode trust in government and politics and in some cases lead to substantial polarisation and violent crime. This is in line with expectations that left-wing extremism and cyberterrorism/extremism may also demand more attention in the coming years.

// Threats associated with environmental and climate developments

Climate change is hitting harder and faster than many expected. Two risks can be distinguished in the climate challenge: physical and transition risks.

In Belgium, climate change will lead to warmer and drier summers and milder and wetter winters. Acute physical risks include increased frequency and intensity of heatwaves, drought, extreme weather events, increased seasonal precipitation and flooding, uncontrolled natural phenomena, and deteriorating air quality. The biggest adverse impact of these phenomena will be on our labour productivity, international trade, ecosystem services and the healthcare sector, closely followed

by infrastructure and agriculture. Furthermore, vulnerable groups in society will be disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate change.

Transition risks are the socio-economic risks arising from the challenge of decarbonising our society and ultimately making it climate-neutral, given that the transition to a climate-neutral society requires far-reaching structural changes, with implications for many vital sectors in Belgium, such as mobility, housing and energy, as well as production and consumption patterns.

Moreover, climate change is a global crisis that threatens stability worldwide and heightens a number of risks that must be included in security analyses. These risks include food security, conflict, mass migration, international law and governance, public health, and biodiversity loss.

// Health risks in a globalised world

Increased globalisation is conducive to the spread of diseases with pandemic potential such as COVID-19 and diseases that are communicable between humans and animals. A contagious disease among farm animals will not only have a major financial impact, but can also pose a risk to human health. For some of these diseases, no treatment will be available or there will be a lack of the required vaccines. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how far-reaching the impact can be on security interests such as physical safety, social and political stability and economic security. This also per se entails greater risks for Belgians travelling or living abroad. For example, COVID-19 forced the government to repatriate more than 11,000 Belgian nationals.

There are also diseases associated with the healthcare sector. This includes healthcare-related infections where multidrug-resistant bacteria are of most concern. As well as antibiotic resistance, resistant forms of tuberculosis are emerging that pose a severe threat to public health. For the chronically ill, among others, certainty in terms of the supply of medicines is very important.

The integrity of the food chain can be jeopardised by various incidents, with possible repercussions for public health and food security.

Finally, invasive non-native animals, plants or micro-organisms are expected to pose an increasing threat due to globalisation and climate change. If these species thrive here, they could harm biodiversity and the economy.

// CBRNe – Weapons of mass destruction

The CBRNe risk is a major issue for Belgium. In recent years, the (transnational) threats from chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear agents, potentially combined with the use of explosives (CBRNe), have increased. As well as being intentional or criminal in nature, CBRNe incidents can also happen accidentally. For both categories, the risk is assessed to be of a low probability, but with a potentially major impact on public health, the environment and the economy.

In a climate of mounting international tensions, regional arms races are resurfacing, and certain countries are feeling less and less bound by multilateral arms control agreements. An additional threat comes from the application of technological developments to weapons systems, which reduces response times and increases unpredictability. Advances in biological research are bringing potentially dangerous applications within reach. An attack using CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) agents requires specific knowledge, but access to information (via the internet) lowers the threshold.

Terrorist organisations or extremists are calling for attacks using CBRN agents. The presence of critical infrastructure and networks can considerably increase the impact of a CBRNe attack. Belgium, and in particular Brussels as a major diplomatic hub, could be a target in this regard.

A CBRNe incident can also happen without malicious intent. Despite technological progress and increasing safety and security measures, human error remains one of the main factors underlying accidents. Human failure, technical defects or natural causes can be a source of risks in nuclear and 'Seveso' chemical facilities (both widespread in Belgium) or in the transport sector.

// Disruption of vital infrastructure

Any disruption or failure of vital infrastructure that delivers processes or performs functions of crucial importance to society can lead to serious social disruption or pose a threat to national security. Risks and threats to this vital infrastructure may have a human cause (espionage, attacks or sabotage and cybercrime with internal and/or external involvement) or a technological one. Solar storms and other extreme weather phenomena may also cause serious disruption.

Space technologies are used in many of the technological applications that society is increasingly reliant on, such as communications and geo-positioning. The speed of these advances has created not only new opportunities but also vulnerabilities if access to space-related services is intentionally or accidentally cut off.

In a world where technology and society are becoming increasingly intertwined and given the mutual dependence of the functions in these vital sectors, it is of paramount importance that they are appropriately secured, protected and resilient. Against this backdrop, in Warsaw in 2016, NATO allies undertook to increase resilience by pursuing seven baseline requirements, and within the EU as well more work is being done on resilience¹.

// Increasing pressure on international values, standards and cooperation

A rules-based international order is key to our vital interests. The multilateral framework helps to reduce the unpredictability of international relations and to prevent conflict and instability. However, the increasing geopolitical and geo-economic tensions between the superpowers are putting great pressure on the system. This disruption can take various forms, from misuse of the veto power in the UN Security Council to countries' withdrawal from international agreements and commitments.

The disruption of cooperation in areas such as health, security, non-proliferation or climate not only has direct consequences for our economy and our international role but also has a direct impact on Belgian citizens abroad. In today's globalised world, our country extends beyond its physical borders. Belgians abroad, our companies and in particular our diplomatic missions and consular posts risk being targeted by violent actions because of their links with Belgium and the country's values and positions, if prevailing international standards are not respected.

The EU, NATO and the OSCE are not immune to the pressures on the international system. On the one hand, external powers are actively seeking to undermine their cohesion and effectiveness through various hybrid actions. On the other hand, the

¹ The seven baseline requirements are: 1) assured continuity of government and critical government services; 2) resilient energy supplies; 3) ability to deal effectively with uncontrolled movement of people; 4) resilient food and water resources; 5) ability to deal with mass casualties; 6) resilient civil communications systems; 7) resilient civil transportation systems.

governments of some members of these organisations are also turning away from multilateralism. The fact that on occasion, certain EU Member States are challenging the fundamental principles and values on which the European integration project is based, including the rule of law, weakens not only the EU's international influence but also the same foundations that are essential for maintaining our economic prosperity, for preserving our security and for ensuring respect for individual and collective values.

Organised strategies to manipulate opinion, by means of the mass dissemination of fake news and the exploitation of algorithms inherent in the current functioning and programming of social media, are growing in influence and can unbalance societies by influencing public opinion or electoral processes.



Policy orientations

In response to the identified risks and threats, Belgium will pursue an integrated policy designed to strengthen our country's resilience, at all levels, in order to safeguard Belgium's national interests.

This policy is a necessary condition for active strategic efforts at home and abroad to contribute to a secure environment. Just as the risks and threats are the result of closely intertwined internal and external events and developments, the response to them requires both decisive action at all Belgian policy levels and action abroad, together with partners, especially in the EU context.

This integrated approach applies to all the domains covered below. All domains, regardless of how they are grouped below, are interconnected and the strategy must therefore be considered as a single entity.



Included here are both existing policies that already meet existing needs and new policy orientations. In this way, this National Security Strategy offers a broad strategic framework, not only for existing policy, such as the National Security Plan, the Strategic Memorandum on Extremism and Terrorism, the Framework Document on Integrated Security and the Cybersecurity Strategy Belgium 2.0, but also for new policy initiatives.

01 + Protecting democracy and the rule of law

// Safeguarding our democracy and values and countering polarisation

In the EU, as in the rest of the world, democracy, rule-of-law principles and fundamental values are coming under increasing pressure. Belgium too needs to be vigilant in this regard. The process of democratic renewal initiated by federal, regional and local governments is an important step in this regard.

The EU is mindful of these developments. With the European Democracy Action Plan, the European Commission aims to build more resilient democracies across the EU and address the areas where democratic systems and citizens are most vulnerable. These include ensuring free and fair elections, promoting democratic participation, strengthening media freedom and pluralism, and combating disinformation. In terms of countering threats, the plan places a strong emphasis on empowering citizens and civil society. As regards tackling disinformation, the proposal for European legislation on digital services will increase security and accountability online.

Action to guarantee human rights and equality in society is one of the tasks of government and is an important factor in countering polarisation. Maintaining the social contract between government and citizens is an essential part of this.

Belgium will continue to work in this area and will promote the importance of our democratic values internationally. For example, it will strive within the EU to ensure respect for the values underpinning the bloc.

// A multidisciplinary approach to extremism, terrorism and breeding grounds for the radicalisation process

Further investments will be made in a multidisciplinary approach focused on risk management, with an emphasis on early detection, exchange of information, continuous individual threat analysis and, based on this, the appropriate measures tailored to each individual. The ultimate aim is always twofold: to reintegrate the individual into society and to protect society. Specific measures were set out in the Strategic Memorandum on Extremism and Terrorism and the Framework Document on Integrated Security.

A local approach is vital here. The local task forces coordinate as to which services or departments are best placed to take the most appropriate measures. These measures may be proactive – more security-oriented or repressive – or else preventive or aimed at social reintegration. With regard to the latter aspects, the Local Integrated Security Cells on radicalism, extremism and terrorism, at city and municipality levels, have a crucial role to play. Such a multidisciplinary approach offers the best guarantees for limiting the harmful effects of radicalisation.

In recent years, alongside the priority given to dealing with foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), constant attention has been paid to various forms of ideological extremism and terrorism. This approach makes it possible to monitor any form of extremism or terrorism and to respond quickly to new developments. In some cases, opening a criminal investigation will be the only possible way to protect society from certain terrorist activities, such as those of networks recruiting young people to wage jihad, of groups planning to commit terrorist attacks or of lone actors.

Our legislation provides a sufficiently broad arsenal of investigative resources and criminal law provisions to combat terrorism. However, ongoing attention must be paid to ensuring sufficient specialised capacity in the police and intelligence services and the Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment (CUTA), in particular to monitor and deal with harmful internet content, as well as to further develop cooperation between all partners.

In addition, continuous efforts must be made to tackle breeding grounds for the radicalisation process. This is achieved through the action plans and strategic plans drawn up by the regional authorities responsible for prevention. The work starts with traditional policy areas such as education, welfare, the labour market, citizenship education and integration. There are also strong links here with the issue of polarisation.

However, a national approach can only be successful if it dovetails with European and international efforts. At EU level, these include the Counter-Terrorism Agenda proposed in December 2020 to make the EU more resilient to terrorist threats, and active Belgian involvement in the Network of Prevent Policy Makers. Cooperation on all aspects of terrorism through Europol and Eurojust and through bilateral contacts will be strengthened. At UN level, Belgium will sign up to the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy as well as the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Given the large number of Belgium-linked FTFs who remain abroad, we will bolster our own intelligence and diplomatic capabilities and bilateral cooperation with partners in order to continue monitoring risks in relevant regions and identify individual solutions.

Combating terrorism requires broad-based, long-term action. Belgium can therefore be relied upon to contribute to international counter-terrorism efforts anywhere in the world, following on from its current deployment in Iraq and the Sahel. The deployment of Belgium's armed forces, in ad hoc formations or as part of EU or NATO operations and missions, requires an integrated approach with strong coordination between the Federal Public Service (FPS) Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence. This reflects the fact that combating terrorism is pre-eminently a civil-military endeavour in which strong local involvement and the support of local authorities in ensuring their own security and stability are essential.

// Clamping down hard on organised crime

A complementary approach is needed within the security chain (police, justice system, security partners, etc.) to respond more effectively to the increasingly international, mobile, persistent and poly-criminal nature of criminal networks, and their use of every conceivable counter-strategy (corruption, infiltration in the legal economy, social networks, etc.) to maximise their profits. The policy orientations for an integrated and comprehensive approach to organised crime involving all relevant security actors in Belgium are set out in the Framework Document on Integrated Security 2022-2024 and the National Security Plan 2022-2025.

They adopt a judicial approach (including the full spectrum of administrative enforcement options) aimed at preventing criminal organisations from becoming established and stopping interlinkage between legal and illegal activities. Equally

important is the use of digital innovation and specific innovative investigation techniques (with a particular focus on the potential offered by big data and artificial intelligence), subject to the appropriate privacy and other safeguards.

Clamping down hard on organised crime implies not only an unwavering commitment to arresting criminals but certainly also financial measures targeting criminal assets based on the 'follow the money' principle.

As vital transport hubs are often used by criminal organisations as centres for their activities, the competent authorities and security partners should make the efforts required to secure them.

Enhanced international and judicial cooperation in Europe and globally should help to better identify criminal networks and take coordinated action against them. Through bilateral agreements with third countries and through European security policy, countries of origin and countries where criminal profits are invested are made aware of the issues and encouraged to take appropriate action. At European level, the EU strategy to tackle organised crime provides the framework for the period 2021-2025. Belgium will play an active part in implementing this strategy.

The international exchange of information should be strengthened, through direct channels such as Europol, Eurojust, Interpol and the Camden Assets Recovery Inter-Agency Network (CARIN), the last of these being supported by the new European Public Prosecutor's Office. The establishment of operational information exchange networks, such as GlobE, for tackling corruption, is important.

At Benelux level, the ratification and proper implementation of the new Benelux Police Treaty is a key priority.

// Efficient and proper law enforcement

Law enforcement contributes to a more just, more humane and safer society. Every identified crime must be met with a proportionate and socially relevant response within a socially acceptable time frame, taking into account the interests of victims and the protection of the public interest, of public order and of litigants whose vulnerable status means that they are given extra protection by the law. Access to justice is important for trust in the rule of law.

Two essential components of this are: detecting and prosecuting crimes in an objective, humane and independent manner, with respect for the law and for fundamental rights and freedoms; and determining and implementing a responsible and realistic criminal policy that responds to all developments that take place in society. This requires criminal policy to be constantly adjusted and its application to be evaluated across the country.

Tackling impunity for serious crimes under international law is vital to strengthen the rule of law at international level, secure justice for victims and ensure lasting peace. Cooperation between states, but also between states and international criminal courts and other investigative mechanisms, is necessary to achieve these objectives. Belgium attaches great importance to this and makes it a priority in its foreign policy. At domestic level, the inherent gravity of these crimes, which undermine not only Belgian but also international public order, requires the prioritisation of investigations into serious violations of international humanitarian law, in particular those relating to genocide, crimes against humanity and the most serious war crimes.

02 + Increased commitment to economic security

Safeguarding the essential elements that enable the survival and optimal development of our socio-economic model requires a global approach based on the following key components: a free, secure and fair international environment for economic actors; the strategic autonomy of the Belgian and European economy, i.e. guaranteed access to energy resources, raw materials, production capacity, technology and markets; the security of critical infrastructure; food security and the supply of medicines; and finally, securing the products of scientific research and research & development.

Economic competences are divided between the federal and regional levels. Cooperation and coordination are therefore crucial to guarantee this economic security. For example, it is important to have a uniform list of strategic sectors where cooperation with third countries or inflow of foreign capital could pose a potential risk to our economic security. Such a uniform approach should make it possible to optimally protect our country's economic and scientific potential against threats from third countries, such as espionage, economic destabilisation and interference.

// A free, secure and fair international environment

To be successful, Belgian companies must be able to compete on a level economic playing field based on transparent rules. Internationally, Belgium is in favour of stronger mutually binding and enforceable commitments on sustainable development, including compliance with environmental, climate and social standards. This will help to ensure better global governance and fairer conditions for international competition. Where national markets are unilaterally shielded, a form of reciprocity must be possible, without lapsing into protectionism.

In addition to existing trade defence instruments, the EU has proposed a toolbox of various measures to better protect our economic players and governments. These include the framework for screening of foreign direct investment, the EU toolbox on 5G cybersecurity, the International Procurement Instrument and the Regulation on foreign subsidies distorting the internal market. As well as helping to establish these instruments, Belgium should also apply them in a timely manner and, where necessary, transpose them into domestic legislation.

The EU needs to further strengthen its resilience to financial and monetary crises. Both the integrated EU system for supervision of the economic and financial capacity of Member States and institutions and the solidarity of these countries and institutions in the face of aggressive speculation are crucial in this regard. Completion of the banking union, a deepening of the capital market and greater autonomy of the EU's finance industry vis-à-vis financial centres outside the EU would be steps in the right direction.

Belgium also supports the ongoing discussion on how the EU can arm itself economically and financially against the adverse consequences of decisions taken by other actors, such as trade barriers or the extraterritorial effects of unilateral sanctions. New forms of protection for European economic actors should be explored, as well as a strengthening of the euro in global trade.

// Enhanced strategic autonomy

There is, at least for the time being, a lack of consensus in the EU on the degree of autonomy, the scope of the sectors involved and the required resilience. In any case, the concept of 'open' strategic autonomy must not lead to protectionism. The EU must manage its interdependence with the rest of the world through partnership agreements, external trade policy and development cooperation. This is particularly important in relation to the EU's main trading partners, but also to its neighbours and African countries.

Just as the European Commission, in the European Industrial Strategy revised in 2021, identified the specific products in sensitive economic ecosystems for which the EU is heavily dependent on third countries, Belgium should also identify strategic sectors for its own economy, analyse their vulnerabilities and, where appropriate, determine who is responsible for building up strategic stocks, so that companies can work on their own resilience. On this basis, we must work with our European partners to diversify production and supply chains, build up strategic stocks and promote production and investment in Europe. In doing so, we must take into account the specific nature of Belgium's economic fabric and in particular the role played in it by SMEs. More of a focus on the circular economy will also help to reduce dependence on some goods and services.

With regard to energy security in particular, the emphasis will be on extensive electrification, European interconnection and investments in sustainable, flexible and renewable technologies, along with further digitalisation of the energy sector.

// Supporting and protecting research and development

Innovation is one of the main catalysts for wealth creation in our country. Key to this is support for scientific research and industrial and technological development, including at European level. Where possible and appropriate, Belgium can join European industrial and research initiatives and alliances that promote cooperation in such high-tech sectors with a view to strengthening European industrial value chains.

Such international cooperation may also be useful with third countries, always bearing in mind the associated risks to both the strategic autonomy and intellectual property of European actors. A mechanism for monitoring international collaborations has a role to play here, particularly for government-funded research and with a particular focus on information at the start of the chain, such as visa applications. In addition, good cooperation and information exchange between security and intelligence services and research centres are essential to protect the intellectual property and innovation potential in our country. Overall, a new legislative framework would allow for more systematic cooperation between the business community and security and intelligence services.

The maritime sector is gaining in economic importance. Belgium must continue to work within various multilateral organisations to protect the international shipping system, including freedom of navigation. As northern shipping routes become more accessible, it is recommended that Belgium seek observer status in the Arctic Council and analyse the opportunities and threats stemming from the Arctic region. There are also economic interests associated with the energy transition, which require policy action. For example, Belgian companies are global players in the field of offshore wind energy and hydrogen. A maritime strategy developed in partnership with economic actors can enable Belgium to play an active role in protecting its economic interests.

03 + Strengthening resilience

// Resilience of vital services

In addition to the European Programme for Critical Infrastructure Protection, Belgian legislation makes explicit reference to transport, energy, finance, electronic communications, drinking water, public health, digital infrastructure and space as sectors where an error, incident or attack could have serious consequences for vital functions. Operators of such critical infrastructure are obliged to draw up a security plan, to designate a point of contact, to organise drills and inspections and to report incidents, as well as to take additional measures depending on the threat level after an analysis by the relevant services.

The concept of national resilience goes beyond just the physical security of critical infrastructure. The identification of risks is systematically linked to critical entities through an accurate risk analysis and followed up by taking appropriate and preventive measures to limit the risks.

The importance of this is recognised by both the EU and NATO. The EU Directive on the resilience of critical entities, to be transposed into domestic legislation, aims to make critical services more resilient. Measures include physical security, cyber-security, the ability to screen staff, incident notification, climate change adaptation measures, business continuity measures and the identification of alternative supply chains.

NATO's seven baseline requirements represent the basic needs that could be affected in an emergency and for which a society or nation must be prepared in order to increase the country's resilience and better operationalise national emergency planning. The emphasis is on civil structures, resources and services as the first line of defence.

To implement the first baseline requirement, Belgium is already devising on a framework for protecting people in key functions, as well as a formalised plan to guarantee the continuity of government and critical government services. A gap analysis is currently being carried out for the other baseline requirements. This will provide a basis for examining how to enhance resilience in the relevant sectors, in collaboration with the authorities in the various government departments.

// Climate change

Since 2010, Belgium has been analysing the expected impact of climate change and identifying vulnerable sectors as part of its National Adaptation Strategy. This gave rise to the National Adaptation Plan 2017-2020.

In June 2021, a new European adaptation strategy was adopted, providing the framework for national and federal policies. This strategy, based on robust data and risk analyses, focuses on faster adaptation and a more systemic approach, streamlining climate resilience across all sectors and policy areas and at all policy levels.

Further risk analyses are needed to broaden knowledge about the specific impact of climate change on social services in vital sectors. In the meantime, initial discussions about drawing up a new national adaptation plan have started, revolving around structural measures to limit the risks and initiate a climate transition towards more



resilient vital sectors and essential service providers, and a more resilient economy and society in general.

As competences on climate policy in Belgium are very closely intertwined between the federal level and the federated entities, coordination is an absolute prerequisite for an effective and efficient climate and security policy.

The transition to a climate-neutral society by 2050 will require far-reaching structural changes and major investments from all actors – not only governments but also households and businesses – in a range of areas but especially in infrastructure.

The greening of financing flows (both public and private) will form an important part of the transition. Work has recently started on developing a Belgian strategy for sustainable financing, encompassing both public investment and the role of financial market players.

Belgium's policy on reducing greenhouse gas emissions is laid down in the National Energy and Climate Plan (up to 2030) and Belgium's long-term strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions (up to 2050). Both policy documents predate the raising of Europe's ambitions to at least a 55% reduction by 2030 and the achievement of climate neutrality by 2050. They will therefore be updated in the light of the EU objectives.

Delaying action will be riskier and more costly than taking timely action. However, the transition risk can be considerably reduced by a clear policy vision, policy coherence and policy consistency, and an intelligent approach could even turn the transition into a socio-economic opportunity.

In addition to these domestic measures, Belgium will ensure that its national policies do not lead to deforestation and increasing emissions in third countries, but contribute to the global response to climate change, in particular by supporting developing countries in their energy transition through international climate finance and helping these countries protect themselves against the potentially destabilising impact of climate change.

// Public health

An integrated approach to public health is vital. Having a better understanding of the risks should lead to effective prevention and more sophisticated emergency plans, thereby enabling health crises to be managed more effectively.

As a member of the World Health Organization (WHO), Belgium has incorporated the agreements on reporting and control of infectious diseases into its domestic legislation. In this context, preparedness plans have been drawn up for general health crises and more specifically for pandemics. They form the basis for building up a national strategic stock of protective equipment and medication. Important lessons will undoubtedly be learnt from the COVID-19 crisis about how to optimise this process.

As Belgium's national contact point, the FPS Health is responsible for surveillance, risk analysis and risk management for communicable diseases, new or unknown diseases and biological, chemical and nuclear health crises with international consequences. The Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain is responsible for the sanitary and phytosanitary integrity of the food chain.

Cybersecurity is an essential part of risk mitigation in the healthcare sector, in terms of both protecting patient data and safe and secure medical equipment.

Within the EU, Belgium actively participates in initiatives to strengthen coordinated action by Member States to combat infectious diseases and enhance resilience. The

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control also plays an important role here.

The COVID-19 crisis has taught us that there is a need for more European and international cooperation. To this end, the European Commission plans to establish a European Health Union that should improve protection, prevention, preparedness and response capabilities vis-à-vis threats to human health. Belgium, with its advanced health system and recognised expertise in areas such as research and production of medicines, will contribute to these objectives.

At multilateral level, Belgium advocates a stronger WHO in crisis situations, as part of a 'One Health' approach combining the multilateral channels of global health, animal health, agriculture and environment.

Following a proposal by the EU, negotiations for an international pandemic treaty are set to begin. The aim of the treaty is to bolster international efforts on global health security, preparedness and response as part of a horizontal strengthening of health systems, universal healthcare, efforts to combat inequalities and the promotion of human rights, including sexual and reproductive health.

Belgian Development Cooperation, together with our partner countries, is also helping to strengthen health systems, step up the fight against major epidemics, ensure access to high-quality and affordable pharmaceutical products, and promote the availability of sufficient and well-trained health personnel.

// An open and safe cyberspace

Cybersecurity aims to minimise the risk of disruption or unauthorised access to information and communication technology (ICT) systems. It helps to safeguard public and private investments and to create new opportunities and jobs.

Cybersecurity requires joint efforts and shared responsibility, in which all stakeholders must play their part. Citizens, businesses, public authorities and organisations of vital interest to our country are all primarily responsible for protecting their own assets and systems, and the data contained in those systems. However, the government should strongly support these groups and assist them as best it can with their security efforts. A number of public authorities, from intelligence and security services to industry regulators, each have their own responsibilities in this respect, in line with their specific areas of competence. As the national authority in this area, the Centre for Cyber Security Belgium (CCB) has a key role in coordinating this cross-cutting approach.

The Cybersecurity Strategy Belgium 2.0 sets out the strategic objectives up to 2025. These include investing in a secure network infrastructure, creating cybersecurity guidelines for users and administrators, protecting organisations of vital interest and the seats of international institutions in Belgium, and strengthening public, private and academic collaboration.

In order to be able to respond more effectively to cyberthreats, greater efforts will be made to map international threats, disrupt criminal cyberinfrastructure and develop an appropriate offensive capacity. Developing the cyber capabilities of the Ministry of Defence fits in with this, as does the coordinated attribution of cyberattacks to specific persons, groups or states. Identifying those responsible for an attack is an important deterrent, but it is also a complex technical and political exercise in which the FPS Foreign Affairs has a special role to play.

The cyberthreat is global and requires active cyberdiplomacy and cooperation at bilateral and multilateral levels. At European level, the EU Cybersecurity Strategy of December 2020 is an important step towards stronger collective resilience. The



CCB works with partner organisations in other Member States, as well as with the EU Agency for Cybersecurity and the new European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre. Particular attention will be paid to application of the EU's Security of Network and Information Systems Directive, which, among other things, strengthens security requirements for enterprises and other entities, focuses on the security of supply chains, streamlines reporting obligations and envisages stricter supervisory measures for national authorities.

// Secure use of new technological developments

As well as many opportunities, there are particular risks associated with emerging technologies such as 5G, and the emerging and disruptive technologies that create new or enhance existing means of espionage, interference and sabotage. Technological independence from foreign powers is crucial in this regard. In addition, deployment of these technologies within Belgium must involve a due awareness of the risks and of our resilience, in both technological and societal terms. Belgium therefore participates actively in consultations on new European legislation in these areas, taking into account the importance of technological innovation, security enforcement issues and the protection of fundamental values. The ongoing discussions about the ethical use of artificial intelligence and limiting the exploitation of algorithms inherent in the current functioning and programming of social media are one example of this.

As far as 5G is concerned, cross-sectoral efforts are already under way with the development of a legislative framework that should enable Belgium to mitigate the security risks posed by so-called high-risk vendors. In addition, the consequences and risks associated with the technological component of new applications and increasing interconnectivity will be monitored, especially with regard to the roll-out of 5G in vital national sectors. Further expertise must also be built up on emerging disruptive technologies in order to form an accurate picture of the associated risks and what impact they could have on our national interests.

Given the increasing importance of space-based applications, better protection and resilience of space systems and the vital services that depend on them is essential. A national approach, such as the creation of an inter-federal space agency, could enhance synergies between the different players in this field and promote the development of a coherent strategy at national level.

Finally, as part of the development of the European satellite navigation system Galileo, a robust encrypted service for public authorities is planned, known as the Public Regulated Service. Given its importance, a clear policy must be worked out for this service and its use in our country.

// Resilience to CBRNe risks and support for non-proliferation and disarmament

The establishment in 2019 of the CBRNe expertise centre as a national platform, led by the National Crisis Centre (NCCN), was an important step towards a multidisciplinary approach to CBRNe risks incorporating accidental (safety) and intentional (security) aspects in the following domains: prevention and security, operationalisation of CBRNe-related emergency plans, research and development, support for crisis management in real situations, and international cooperation on CBRNe risks. Further investments will be made in this capability.

The CBRNe centre is also the national contact point for the European Commission regarding monitoring and implementation of the EU CBRN Action Plan. In addition, the centre strengthens civil-military cooperation on CBRNe risks at national level, in accordance with the relevant points for attention at NATO level.

Internationally, there is an ongoing need to combat proliferation and repair the fabric of treaties on arms control and disarmament. Belgium continues to view the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as the cornerstone for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. Our country will play a proactive role in the NPT Review Conference in 2022 and, together with our European NATO allies, will examine how the multilateral non-proliferation framework can be strengthened and how the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons can give new impetus to multilateral nuclear disarmament. An effective and efficient international arms control regime is vital to respond to the range of current threats. Prevention, strict control and good cooperation are key here.

Belgium also supports other disarmament and arms control initiatives, including outside the nuclear domain. For example, it is working on establishing a regulatory framework for lethal autonomous weapons systems and is striving to secure an international ban in this area.

04 + An international responsibility

// Enhanced efforts to assist and protect Belgians abroad

With more and more Belgians travelling, living or maintaining family ties abroad, the responsibility of government and the expectations placed on our diplomatic and consular network are also increasing.

Frequent evacuations and crisis management incidents illustrate how much the direct role of the FPS Foreign Affairs in the safety and security of citizens abroad has evolved. This requires a diplomatic and consular network that is fit for purpose and capable of meeting specific capacity and security requirements.

In addition, these situations have highlighted the importance of good cooperation and communication between all relevant government departments or ministries with a security aspect, including Interior, Defence, Foreign Affairs, Justice, and Asylum and Migration. This context has once again demonstrated the importance of a secure ICT network that complies fully with international standards.

// An enhanced approach to conventional and hybrid state threats

While a preventive and reactive security policy is undoubtedly a national responsibility, it also transcends national capabilities. It therefore makes sense that Belgium should rely on and contribute to the multilateral protection and defence mechanisms of the EU and NATO.

Participation in collective deterrence and defence within NATO is much more than just a military responsibility. It involves a coordinated deployment of all state resources, a fair distribution of risks and burdens, and attention to strategic autonomy and resilience.

The EU is not only essential for strengthening our resilience. Solidarity between Member States also has an important effect in deterring hybrid actions in which one or more Member States are targeted by a cyberattack or economic blackmail, for example. The European defence pillar must be further consolidated by expanding



existing and launching new initiatives for bilateral and European capability cooperation. The EU and its Member States must also consistently live up to their responsibilities and take action when crises outside Europe threaten our security.

In order to remain a reliable ally and partner, our country will continue to develop credible, flexible and rapidly deployable armed forces. This requires the strategic vision for defence to be updated and implemented. Since the end of the Cold War, the emphasis has been mainly on collective security and foreign operations. In the current security environment, collective defence is once again of central importance. This means that we need to review the range of our capabilities. Cooperation, synergy and, where possible and desirable, integration, both in the EU and NATO context and bilaterally, remain essential with strategic partners such as France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Security comes at a price. Consequently, defence funding has to move towards the average of non-nuclear European NATO member countries and there has to be a willingness to use defence resources effectively to protect our vital interests, in solidarity with our allies and partners.

Belgian action abroad should integrate close civil-military cooperation in support of the UN, the EU and NATO as well as our own bilateral actions. In line with the Comprehensive Approach Strategy Note, the policy options at the different levels of government and the instruments involved should be integrated, without prejudice to the specific objective of each instrument.

The regional priorities for this policy are the Baltic states and the Central European region on the eastern flank, and the Mediterranean, the Middle East, North and West Africa, the Sahel and the Great Lakes region on the southern flank.

It remains essential to protect and where necessary strengthen decision-making processes, institutions and functioning at political and administrative levels, including in organisations such as the EU and NATO. Greater attention needs to be paid to countering foreign influence and political and economic interference.

In the context of the hybrid deployment of different types of threats, our country must develop specific resilience in a number of priority areas such as disinformation (as part of enemy information operations), cyber, violent and extremist organisations, and the protection of our scientific and economic potential (the basis of our prosperity). In this context, the EU Security Union Strategy provides guidance for an integrated and coherent approach that Belgium fully supports. This strategy aims, among other things, to better integrate police and judicial cooperation at European level, also taking into account changes in the technological context.

At national level, permanent mobilisation against hybrid threats requires the necessary detection, analysis, synthesis and coordination initiatives. It is therefore important that the national structures responsible for these initiatives further develop their prevention, preparedness, detection and response capabilities. Since hybrid threats are characterised by the combined use of methods and techniques, a national and interdepartmental 'hybrid threats' platform has already been established to ensure a coordinated and broad-based approach. As regards disinformation in particular, work is under way to set up an interdepartmental mechanism to detect, monitor, analyse and report on disinformation and information operations.

Being home to various EU institutions and NATO Headquarters, Belgium is a magnet for espionage and interference. To combat this threat, the intelligence services seek primarily to create a hostile operating environment for foreign intelligence agents. Political and diplomatic representatives must be made aware of the danger and then be armed against this threat. This fosters a national security culture that ensures the necessary resilience against the threat of espionage and interference.

// A decisive EU

The EU offers Belgium on the one hand the necessary broader framework for key policy areas and on the other hand the best instrument for defending its interests on a global scale. The Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2024 therefore represents an important opportunity.

This also applies to the national security of our country. Only the EU has the scale, powers and resources to implement adequate policies across the spectrum of almost all relevant threats covered in this document. In this regard, Belgium must ensure that the EU systematically and coherently integrates strategic autonomy and resilience into all relevant policy frameworks. As with other important international policy areas, the FPS Foreign Affairs is responsible here for organising and steering dialogue between the federal and regional governments in order to arrive at a Belgian position on European and multilateral issues.

Developing autonomous scientific, technological, digital, industrial and monetary-financial resilience and diplomatic-military decisiveness should enable the EU to protect itself and be a meaningful global player. Where necessary to achieve this, our country will advocate an adjustment of EU competences and decision-making procedures, including at the Conference on the Future of Europe. One example of this already would be changing the decision-making procedure on the Common Foreign and Security Policy from the unanimity rule to a qualified majority.

All of this should allow the EU to be, more than ever, a reliable and independent pillar of a close and authentic partnership with NATO and its transatlantic allies. In this context, Belgium will also make all the necessary efforts to take its share of responsibility for its own security and the joint security of the EU and its Member States and of NATO and its member countries.

An effective Common Foreign and Security Policy requires an adequate autonomous ability to assess the strategic context, take positions on it, announce measures and conduct external operations. From this perspective, it is also necessary to maintain an adequate defence industry in the EU. In this connection, the Ministry of Defence will continue to invest in Europe's capability gaps, and further embed its capabilities with privileged partners among the EU Member States and in the EU context. To this end, Belgium will remain active in the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and show solidarity in its commitments, which must be reported annually via a national implementation plan. The European Defence Fund established by the European Commission will serve to foster and co-finance cooperation projects for the development of military capabilities. The government will give Belgian companies the best possible opportunities in this regard and a framework will be developed for awarding eligibility.

The security of the EU and its Member States, including Belgium, is closely linked to the long-term stability of its immediate surroundings. Belgium will ensure that the EU pursues an appropriate enlargement and neighbourhood policy to contribute to this stability, without weakening the political union in the longer term. However, the EU and Belgium itself must invest particularly in relations with countries that have a real prospect of one day joining the EU.

In addition to these security concerns, due attention must be paid to mitigating the factors driving irregular migration to the EU. In this context, Belgium will continue to work at European level to promote the common asylum and migration policy, which strives to balance the principles of solidarity and responsibility while safeguarding respect for human rights and focuses, among other things, on an integrated border policy, tougher action to combat people smuggling, and enhanced cooperation with third countries.



// An international bridge-builder

Given the interconnected nature of domestic and foreign security, diplomacy is an intrinsic part of national security policy. The multilateral environment, with its erosion of international legal rules and the return of power politics, poses new challenges in this respect. In accordance with the principle of 'cooperate when you can, push back when you must', Belgium will continue to strive to actively involve all countries, including the superpowers, in multilateral cooperation to tackle shared challenges. An inclusive world order is the most effective world order.

Our influence in international politics is therefore a determining factor in the security and prosperity of our country. This influence partly depends on our credibility and our active role in international institutions. At the same time, with the enlargement of the EU and NATO, Belgium's relative weight has decreased. It is therefore vital that Belgium gives itself the means to step up its international presence and engagement in order to counter the systemic risk of a gradual decline in our international influence (and by extension that of the EU), and of a marked erosion of the international consensus about the values that are essential to our social model.

Belgium has long been part of a broad network of multilateral institutions. The effectiveness and efficiency of these institutions are a constant concern. In this context, our country was a member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for the sixth time in 2019-2020, providing a concrete illustration of our multilateral commitment to security.

However, Belgium's multilateral engagement is much broader than this and is reflected in almost all policy areas, including security, prosperity, support for democracy, combating impunity, and climate. Belgium will continue to play an active role in the UN following its UNSC mandate, and aspires to a number of specific mandates, such as membership of the Human Rights Council from 2023 to 2025.

Belgium is also actively involved in conflict prevention, arms control and disarmament in the relevant organisations (the EU, NATO, the OSCE and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons) and to this end engages in diplomatic initiatives with like-minded countries.

Development policy also contributes to stabilisation and security beyond our borders. The Comprehensive Approach Strategy Note gave the FPS Foreign Affairs a central role in a coherent Belgian foreign policy with specific geographical and thematic task forces. Trade and investment policy also contributes to this, in particular by ensuring our connectivity to global markets and upholding norms and standards.

Belgium should be more proactive and assertive in seeking Belgian representation in top positions within priority organisations (the EU, the UN, NATO and the OSCE).

The role of Brussels as an international capital also urgently needs to be strengthened by a coordinated and dynamic host nation policy.

Multilateral action should be able to build on a solid network of bilateral relations. More than ever, our diplomatic representations in the EU and in third countries and our permanent representations to international organisations are key to defending Belgian and European interests, promoting our values and proactively identifying and reporting trends and potential risks.

Photo | 25 August 2021 | A family steps onto the tarmac at Melsbroek Air Base after being evacuated from the Afghan capital Kabul as part of Operation Red Kite.



Monitoring and organisation

// Principles

A national security strategy significantly contributes to a security culture in which an increased awareness of risks and threats is linked to the explicit defence of interests as a basis for policy. Indeed, such a strategy provides a framework for strategic foresight and planning, as well as for consultation and policy, and the directing of resources.

Such a dynamic security approach, operating systematically within the triangle of 'interests – threats and risks – policy', requires a reinforcement of the cross-cutting dimension. In order to embed this in practice, this strategy emphasises resilience and a proactive policy at home and abroad within an integrated approach.



Resilience is understood as a coherent set of measures that enable our society to continue to function by protecting itself against and responding to incidents that jeopardise its vital interests and fundamental values, even when these interests

and values are directly attacked or threatened by large-scale crises. This objective demands resilience from individuals, society, business and government.

However, national resilience by itself is not enough. The policy must also focus on bolstering security in our wider environment and in the EU and NATO's area of interest. Risks and threats should be tackled as early as possible and to the greatest extent possible.

An effective integrated approach therefore combines the following four elements:



01 'Whole of government' approach

In a 'whole of government' approach, security is regarded as an indivisible core task shared by all of our country's governments. This means that the perspectives, interests and contributions of the various government departments are coordinated at federal level and that there is effective cooperation with the federated entities in order to arrive at an efficient, coherent and effective policy.

02 Internal/external

Just as the risks and threats are the result of closely intertwined internal and external factors and developments, so our security interests can rarely be defended by a purely internal or external approach. An active foreign, development and defence policy is therefore inextricably linked to domestic security.

03 Risk management

There is a need for a generic system of risk and crisis management that considers the entire risk cycle and involves all relevant parties. A comprehensive view of risk management requires there to be a focus not only on crisis management but also on risk identification and analysis, as well as prevention and preparedness. For each threat scenario, it must be clear who is

responsible for doing what, as with the national emergency plans for CBRNe or terrorism.

4 'Whole of society' approach

Security is not just a task for government. Everyone in society has a role to play, from the federal and regional governments to business, private partners and academia, right down to individual citizens. This interaction must be clearly defined in advance and based on a public communication strategy aimed at maximising citizens' trust in government and their support for the fundamental values of our society. Credible strategic communication can only be achieved on the basis of coordination between all actors involved in national security policy.

// An enhanced approach

A national security strategy is not a document that once drafted is set in stone, but a process that must be closely monitored. The National Security Strategy offers a long-term vision spanning 10 to 15 years, but one that needs to be updated periodically. A thorough review will take place at the start of each parliamentary term to determine whether developments in the security environment that affect our resilience require adjustments to the strategic agenda. In addition, the Coordination Committee on Intelligence and Security will monitor implementation of the National Security Strategy.

The following measures are planned to support this process:

- » The National Security Council (NSC) and its preparatory committees (the Strategic Committee on Intelligence and Security (SCIS) and the Coordination Committee on Intelligence and Security (CCIS)) remain the primary mechanism used by government to determine national security strategy and policies and to oversee implementation. Limited coordination capacity will be developed within the FPS Chancellery to ensure monitoring and sufficient interdepartmental and intergovernmental cooperation. Special attention will be paid to the way in which the National Security Strategy can be implemented structurally with stakeholders who are not members of the NSC/SCIS/CCIS. As well as other FPSs, the involvement of the federated entities is particularly important in this regard. A framework must also be created in which the business community and security services work together more closely.

- » Strategic foresight analysis will be strengthened and become a permanent part of policy development to ensure that changes in the global, European and national security environment are translated in a timely manner into credible future scenarios so that the National Security Strategy can be adapted and made more future-proof where necessary. Monitoring new technologies will be an important part of this. Knowledge networks in which academia, business and government come together to address specific issues linked to trends, threats and risks offer significant added value here.

- » Given the multidimensional nature of security, where different elements interact and are mutually reinforcing, closer cooperation and interdepartmental teams for policy development and implementation are needed. This way of working already exists in the form of CCIS task forces, the thematic and

geographical working groups led by the FPS Foreign Affairs in the context of the comprehensive approach, but will be further developed and directed.

» The framework of national emergency planning and crisis management, including the legislative framework, will be evaluated with a view to strengthening the chain of command and control with fast, autonomous, robust and secure communication channels and media. The experience of the COVID-19 crisis and the recent catastrophic flooding will provide important lessons in this regard. Consideration will be given to how a consultation platform, in the form of a national security unit with the sectoral authorities, could help to raise awareness among the sectors concerned and ensure the rapid transfer of information and best practices. A proposed template for a sectoral emergency plan could contribute to a harmonised approach.

» Crises and natural disasters abroad affecting Belgian nationals or interests require a specific approach.

» An ecosystem of secure communications, complying with EU and NATO standards, must be established to facilitate the exchange of intelligence, specific information and other sensitive elements.

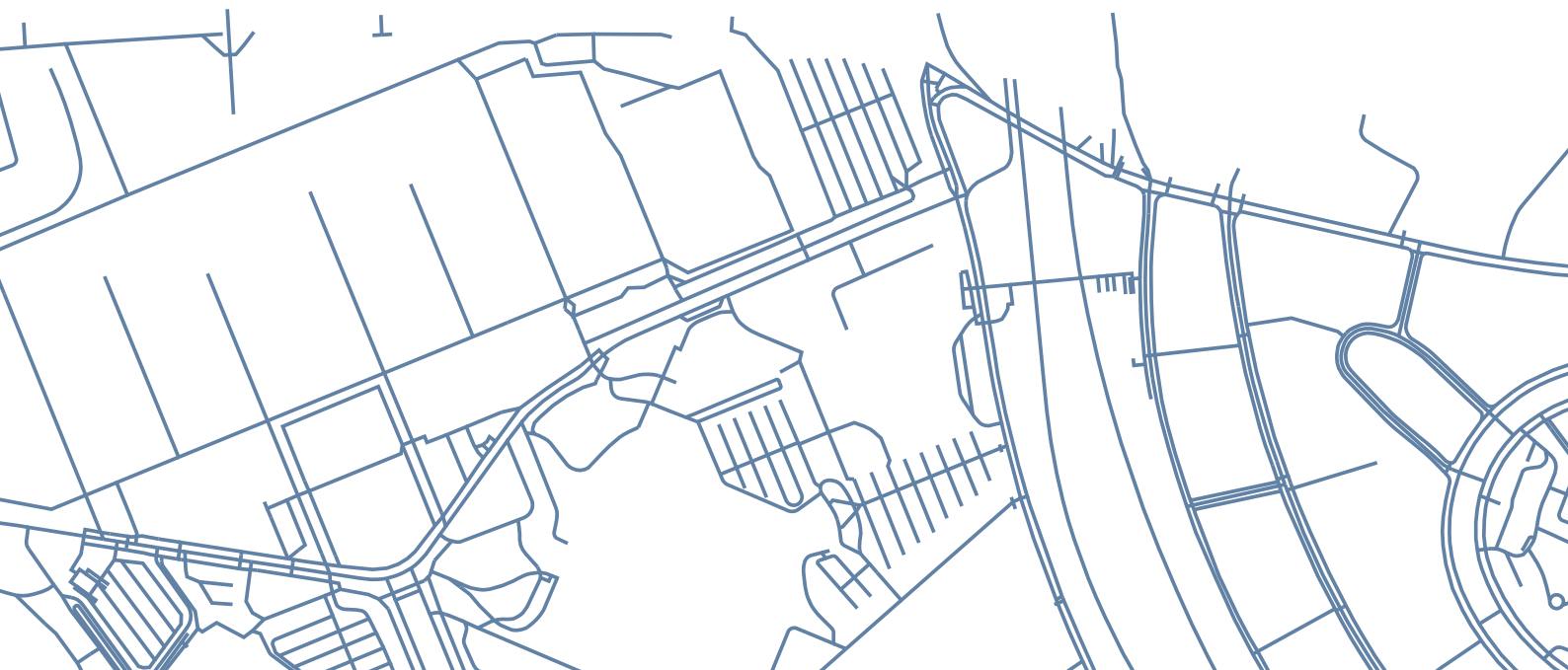
» None of these options will be possible or feasible unless a security culture is developed at all levels within the various government departments. A key component is education, training and exercises in both national and international crisis management.

» The National Security Strategy creates the framework for policy initiatives and for the directing of resources in the implementation of a global and integrated security policy.



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